



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Eschatology and World Christianity

Citation for published version:

Chow, A 2016, 'Eschatology and World Christianity' *Studies in World Christianity*, vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 201–215. DOI: 10.3366/swc.2016.0156

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.3366/swc.2016.0156](https://doi.org/10.3366/swc.2016.0156)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Studies in World Christianity

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Eschatology and World Christianity

Alexander Chow

This essay explores the developments of eschatology in world Christianity to show how Christian thought and practice have interacted with various contexts to produce unique understandings of time and history. While a number of geographical contexts will be discussed, this essay argues that there are shared theological themes which transcend geography due to the important role temporality offers to such discussions, in terms of the future, the present, and the past. Such developments have involved the reinterpretation of preexisting traditional and modern idioms, and the engagement with various contextual factors. Moreover, this shows how eschatology should be understood as having a strong corporate dimension. As such, this essay suggests that eschatology must be understood as a Christian doctrine about the communion of saints, who were, who are, and who are to come.

Keywords: communion of saints, eschatology, kingdom of God, missions, world Christianity

The Century of Eschatology

A number of recent studies on eschatology have described the twentieth century as 'the century of eschatology'.¹ All of them attribute the revived interest in eschatology to the writings of Albert Schweitzer and Karl Barth, before speaking of the theologies of Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg. While the priority is given to Protestant thinkers, some of these studies make mention of the Roman Catholic luminaries Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar, whereas even fewer recognise much significance in Eastern Orthodox developments. Generally speaking,

many of these theologians are in one way or another developing eschatological views mindful of the German philosophies of history arising from G. W. F. Hegel and Karl Marx and, later, the context of two World Wars.

This tendency to prioritise German-language scholarship in the twentieth century is myopic in a number of ways. First, it ignores the Anglo-American developments in millennialism² and its marriage with the Protestant missionary enterprise.³ Many of the pioneer Protestant missionaries such as William Carey, Robert Morrison, and Alexander Duff held a view that the ‘conversion of the Heathens’ would bring about Christ’s millennial kingdom on earth.⁴ This understanding of an earthly golden age which precedes Christ’s return would later be described as postmillennialism. However, by the mid-1800s, the competing view of premillennialism would be rediscovered within Western Christianity,⁵ particularly through the influential thinking of figures such as Edward Irving, William Miller, and J. N. Darby. Many premillennialists held that the comforts of this world should take a backseat to the concerns of the next and Christ’s return could be hastened by the preaching of the gospel to all nations, as Matthew 24:14 seemed to say. It was therefore the Christian’s duty to evangelise the world and usher in Christ’s second coming. Yet by the early twentieth century, postmillennialism would find new life in the form of the social gospel, holding to an optimistic outlook towards history and placing a greater priority on addressing the this-worldly concerns of society at home and on the mission field. The course of Anglo-American Christianity provided the space for missions and millennialism to become undeniable bedfellows.

A second and related issue with the focus on German-language works of eschatology in the twentieth century is to miss another development of the twentieth century: the global shift of Christianity. While many have explored the role of eschatology in terms of missions history, few have analysed the theological developments of world Christianity. Recently, William A. Dyrness and Oscar García-Johnson have attempted to address this gap by providing a chapter in their co-authored book *Theology Without Borders* exploring various eschatologies, looking in turn from Africa, to the Americas, and to Asia.⁶ However, while they offer something useful to the broader theological discourse, it must be remembered that eschatology is largely concerned with time.

Specifically, it is generally understood as a perspective on the end time – the eschaton and its implications today and in history.

While each context gives rise to different theological responses, this essay will argue that there are shared theological themes which *transcend* geographic contexts due to the important role temporality offers to such discussions. By no means is this meant to be an exhaustive treatment. But we will nevertheless be able to see themes arising across a number of indigenous Christian eschatologies based on their respective views on time: future, present, and past.

Oriented towards the Future

Perhaps the most obvious place to start thinking about Christian eschatology is to begin with the end or the eschaton. Not all eschatologies are oriented in this way. But the most well-known are most obviously future-oriented. Moreover, it is worthwhile to note that it is not only Christianity that has this future-oriented dimension. Individuals are often drawn to a sense of eschatological expectation when they lose hope in the present and seek to hasten the promises of resolve in the future.

Lamin Sanneh has argued that the advent of white Europeans in Africa resulted in socio-economic unrest which was reinterpreted in traditional idioms of spiritual and apocalyptic significance.⁷ Moreover, as white Europeans encountered these African millenarian teachings, these conditions formed the catalyst for African Christianity to evolve into new prophetic movements.

Take one of the earliest and most well-known African Christian prophets, William Wadé Harris, a Liberian Grebo who formerly worked as an Episcopalian schoolteacher. In 1910, while Harris was in prison for his involvement in a *coup d'état* against the Liberian government, he received a vision of the Angel Gabriel commissioning him to be a prophet of the gospel of repentance from ‘fetishes’. After his release from prison, Harris began preaching the need for faithfulness to the one true God as he travelled throughout Liberia, Ghana, and the Ivory Coast, baptising over 100,000 people from more than a dozen ethnic groups. Influenced by Russellite

teachings on Christ's millennial kingdom, Harris saw himself as a prophet like Elijah during the last days.⁸ His ministry included remarkable healings and Elijah-like wonders, such as the prediction of a world war in Europe and the calling of fire to fall down from heaven.

Others such as Garrick Braide and his Christ Army Church, Joseph Babalola and his *Aladura* movement, and Simon Kimbangu and the subsequent development of Kimbanguism are but a few examples of the twentieth-century proliferation of Christian prophets in Africa. However, when one preaches about the coming kingdom, confusion occasionally arises over whether this person is a mere prophet or someone much more. This would be the case for Simon Kimbangu who saw himself as commissioned by God to bring about the renewal of the country and a return to the golden age of the Kongo past. Donald J. Mackay argues that this view of Kimbangu was rooted in a tradition of renewal in Kongo thought and given new life in Christian eschatological imagery.⁹ Such a cyclical understanding of time in Kongo thinking would likewise shape how some of Kimbangu's followers would later identify him as an incarnation of the Holy Spirit or as one of the many incarnations of Jesus Christ.¹⁰

The rise of prophets and messiah-like figures is not unique to African Christianity. For instance, we may think about Hong Xiuquan in the mid-nineteenth century who failed the Chinese civil service examination several times before having visions of meeting God, the Heavenly Father, and Jesus, the Heavenly Elder Brother. Hong, seeing himself as Jesus' younger brother, believed his mission was to restore China to the worship of the true God, known in the ancient Chinese classics as *Shangdi*, and to rid the country of demonic forces, including its Manchurian rulers.

Eschatologically, Hong had a decidedly strong millennial outlook.¹¹ He believed the Heavenly Father had charged him to establish a new kingdom on earth, with its capital in Nanjing, and for him to rule it as the Heavenly King. The name of his messianic establishment was the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom (*Taiping Tianguo*). The second part of the name came from the Christian literature Hong received from evangelists which spoke of a 'heavenly kingdom'. The first part of the name, *Taiping* or 'great peace', is originally derived from an idyllic era of the past described in the Daoist text *Zhuangzi*. The notion of the *Taiping* would historically inspire a

number of Chinese millenarian groups who longed to return to this golden age, offering a tradition of renewal that parallels the Kongo thinking which shaped Simon Kimbangu. In a more militant interpretation, for Hong Xiuquan, this synthesis of Christian and Chinese imagery produced a powerful message for him to lead the eschatological kingdom and to overthrow the problems of the present age brought upon by the Manchu-run Qing dynasty. After eleven years of rule in Nanjing, the civil war brought upon by Hong Xiuquan and his vision came to an end in 1864 with more than 20 million dead.

Ever since missionaries working in China first encountered Hong Xiuquan, Westerners have generally been highly critical of his teachings.¹² As with Simon Kimbangu, confusion arose over whether Hong Xiuquan understood himself as a prophet or as a messiah-like figure. This was largely due to his claim to be God's son, which many believed meant that he saw himself as having equal divine status with the third person of the Triune Godhead. Rather, Hong did not claim divine status but simply believed he was called to carry out a divine mission, just like Jesus.¹³

Half a century later, the increasing diversity of millennial views held by missionaries would be matched with an increasing eschatological diversity being formed on the mission field. Take for instance the two important East Asia revivalists and spiritual thinkers in the early twentieth century, Watchman Nee (also known as Ni Tuosheng) of China and Gil Seon-ju (also known as Kil Sŏn-ju) of Korea. The many spiritual writings which bear Watchman Nee's name¹⁴ have been translated into many languages and have been influential amongst groups in Europe and North America such as the Jesus People and restorationist strands within the charismatic movement. While Gil's name is less known to the outside world, the fervour of his Christian spirituality is very well known. Gil would be one of the key figures involved in the Great Pyongyang Revival of 1907 and would be responsible for signature characteristics of Korean Christianity such as early morning prayer (*saebyeok gido*). While many today may recognise the significance of these two men in terms of their Christian spirituality, like the Christian prophets of Africa, it must be remembered that Nee and Gil lived in times of social, political, and moral unrest. They would therefore teach about the importance of spiritual piety and vigour with the

expectation that a new order would come in the near future. Gil would go as far as even predicting the times of Christ's second coming: in one instance, he believed it was going to be in the year 1974, but in another instance he predicted 2002.¹⁵

Both men were deeply influenced by the dispensational premillennialism of their foreign Christian contemporaries and synthesised this with various spiritual beliefs. Generally speaking, dispensationalists such as J. N. Darby and C. I. Scofield taught that all Christians would be raptured before a time of affliction and persecution known as the Great Tribulation. This period would end with the second coming of Christ, accompanied by the resurrected saints, to rule his millennial kingdom. Watchman Nee, informed by the early Keswick movement and the Plymouth Brethren movement, believed there was a distinction between 'spiritual' Christians who are filled with the Holy Spirit and 'carnal' Christians who continue to behave like the unconverted.¹⁶ In terms of eschatology, Nee differed from other dispensationalists by teaching that only the spiritual Christians who overcame the temptations of the world would be raptured, whereas the carnal Christians would remain during the Great Tribulation.¹⁷ Instead of two groups of Christians, Gil Seon-ju spoke of two paradises in the end times: a heavenly one and an earthly one. Whereas the heavenly paradise was reserved for those who put their trust in Jesus Christ, the earthly paradise, a restored Eden which has great similarity with the majestic paradises of Korean religiosity, was reserved for those who persevered through many trials and remained morally upright like Confucius and Buddha.¹⁸ While both Watchman Nee and Gil Seon-ju had their own unique idiosyncrasies, unlike the case of Hong Xiuquan, the overall positive appraisal of these two men has not waned.

Relevant to the Present

While many of the eschatologies we have just discussed focus on hastening and, at times, establishing the eschatological kingdom, this next section will look at others who see the coming kingdom as necessitating moral and material change today. Contrary to what is often assumed, this emphasis was characteristic of much of nineteenth-century premillennialism, as Martin

Spence has shown.¹⁹ However, it has been more self-evidently true amongst those who uphold a postmillennial orientation and see an age of peace coming as a result of Christian social and political activity in the world.

This would particularly be felt in China, when the American social gospel was imported by missionaries associated with groups like the YMCA. Hence the Chinese YMCA secretary Y. T. Wu (also known as Wu Yaozong) would explain in 1930:

For what do we gain even if we actually double our church membership or increase it tenfold within the next five years? And again, for what end do we need to strengthen our Christian faith? It is not an increase in numbers that we should look for, but the sharing of a life in practical service. The number may increase or decrease, but the Kingdom will come that much sooner if we realise what it is to try to live a Christian life in an un-Christian social order.²⁰

In contrast with those who prioritised Christian piety and evangelistic fervour, Wu believed Chinese Christians needed to place a far greater emphasis on the social reconstruction of China. It would not be a far stretch for Wu to see much synergy between Christianity and communism in the 1930s,²¹ then again in the 1950s when he would help establish the Three-Self Patriotic Movement in the new communist-run government of the People's Republic of China.

Half a century later, K. H. Ting (also known as Ding Guangxun), the key leader of the reinstated Three-Self Patriotic Movement following the end of the Cultural Revolution, would have similar concerns as his predecessor. Ting appreciated Wu's understanding of the kingdom of God as stressing the importance of being involved in this world and likewise believed that eschatology must be relevant to the present.²² Ting would eventually be drawn to the evolutionary theology of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who saw the cosmos as constantly developing and ultimately converging in the Omega Point – the cosmic Christ.²³ Christ is Lord over history, enters into this world, and offers a glimpse of God's love to the cosmos to draw the created order towards himself. For Ting, the significance of such thinking is that the work of Christ is not limited to the select few within the Christian church. Rather, Christians and communists can work together for the enrichment of history.

In Latin America, the promise of Marxism and the reforms of Vatican II fuelled the growing priority placed on praxis by a number of Christian thinkers. One of the main exponents of Catholic liberation theology, Gustavo Gutiérrez, building on the political theologies of Jürgen Moltmann and Johann Baptist Metz, explains:

The prophets announce a kingdom of peace. But peace presupposes establishment of justice.... It presupposes the defense of the rights of the poor, punishment of the oppressors, a life free from the fear of being enslaved by others, the liberation of the oppressed. Peace, justice, love, and freedom are not private realities; they are not only internal attitudes. They are social realities, implying a historical liberation.²⁴

Gutiérrez argues that eschatological promises are fulfilled throughout history, not just in the end, and in a history that we can be a part of. Moreover, this outlook calls Christians to be involved in a political enterprise to reject ‘an unjust and alienating social order’ and ‘throw themselves into the struggle for a new society’.²⁵ Jon Sobrino, another exponent of this movement, put it this way: ‘All one need do is learn from Jesus how to live, how to be church, in the faith that the kingdom is at hand; and then, in the shadow of the approaching kingdom, how to go and transform human beings and society.’²⁶ The kingdom of God is best understood through the church living on earth as Jesus lived on earth – the ‘imitation of Christ’.

While eschatology has been a very important theme for many Latin America Christians, it has tended to have a different emphasis when coming from Protestant thinkers. For instance, the evangelical C. René Padilla develops his understanding of Christian missions around the view within New Testament studies, promoted by George Eldon Ladd, that the kingdom of God is ‘already’ but ‘not yet’. That is, in the first coming of Christ, eschatology has invaded history, but the kingdom of God will only be fully consummated in the age to come. For Padilla, this understanding of the kingdom has incredible ramifications for Christian missions. Like many of the figures we have discussed in this section, Padilla believes that the presence of the kingdom of God must be felt today through acts of justice and mercy. Moreover, it has universal ramifications:

The God of redemption is also the creator and judge of all humanity who wills justice and reconciliation for all. His purpose for the church, therefore, cannot be separated from his purpose for the world. The church is properly understood only when it is seen as the sign of God's universal kingdom, the firstfruits of redeemed humanity.²⁷

Yet he continues to explain that the universality of the gospel does not mean that all will participate in the eschatological kingdom, but that the church is called to proclaim the kingdom to all, in word and in deed. Evangelism and social responsibility are inseparable.²⁸

Origins in the Past

While we have focused most of our attention on the two most obvious expressions of eschatology in world Christianity, forward-looking orientations and outlooks concerned with being relevant in the present, this third and final section will briefly look at one of the least obvious themes: an interest in the past.

John S. Mbiti has argued that African thinking has a two-dimensional understanding of time: a long past and a dynamic present.²⁹ Mbiti believes that many African languages do not exhibit a 'future' as understood in many linear views of time. Instead, future events are matters that will occur, with full certainty, and often within a foreseeable period. He explains:

Time has to be experienced in order to make sense or to become real. A person experiences time partly in his own individual life, and partly through the society which goes back many generations before his own birth. Since what is in the future has not been experienced, it does not make sense; it cannot, therefore, constitute part of time...³⁰

Such a view of time has significant implications for what is generally understood as the future. It may offer a partial explanation, for instance, of the rise of African Christian prophets who were very clear about the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God.

Secondly, this view places a priority on the past. Mbiti elaborates that, ‘*Actual time* is therefore what is present and what is past. It moves “backward” rather than “forward”; and people set their minds not on future things, but chiefly on what has taken place.’³¹ In certain respects, this is understood in terms of stories of the past – such as the creation of the cosmos, the first humans, and the origins of the tribe. It extends to an understanding of human life as part of a rhythm of nature – from birth, through various life stages, and into death. But those who are dead are never completely dead, but are part of the ‘living-dead’ who are alive in the memory of those who knew the person and alive in the world of spirits.

Although a number of individuals have critiqued Mbiti’s explanation of the African understanding of time,³² Kwame Bediako rightly points out that Mbiti uses it ‘as a foil, emphasising more clearly the “elevated christological perspective”’ of the New Testament.³³ According to Mbiti, there is a tension between the African understanding of time as two-dimensional (a long past and a dynamic present) and the New Testament understanding of time as having two ages (the present age and the age to come). Previous missionary endeavours in Africa have failed to recognise this tension, resulting in many African Christians disappointed and disillusioned by a *parousia* that never seemed to be happening.³⁴ Instead, he argues that African Christians can benefit from a more relevant eschatology which is mindful of the role of Christ and of the sacraments.³⁵ These enable a convergence of time and space – the latter in terms of both physical and spiritual worlds. Moreover, it helpfully engages the living-dead in African thought with the Christian notion of the communion of saints.

These last points are likewise taken up by the Singaporean Chinese, Simon Chan. While Chan does not seem to be aware of Mbiti and does not operate using the same linguistic approach to time, he is likewise concerned about the spiritual world and the role of ancestors in Asia. Like the living-dead of Africa, Chan explains that in East Asia, ‘family solidarity is experienced not just with those present but with those who are dead’.³⁶ Hence, ‘ancestral veneration’ or ‘ancestral worship’ poses important challenges for East Asian Christians. He explains that Protestants need the corrective offered in the Catholic doctrine of the communion of saints, which emphasises the importance of the sacraments in mediating communion with the

dead.³⁷ Like Mbiti, Chan believes such a view helps to mitigate the tension between Asian traditional understanding of ancestors and Christian eschatology.

Chan explores the theme of the communion of saints vis-à-vis the literature produced by the German Lutheran-Catholic dialogue. It expresses agreement that the partaking of the bread and the wine unite the church to Christ and is the basis of the communion of saints, living and dead. However, the key difference deals with respective understandings of sainthood. In contrast with dominant Protestant thinking, Catholics 'tend to stress continual development of personal sanctity even beyond this life.'³⁸ Chan commends this Catholic understanding, seeing it as offering the possibility for the living to intercede for deceased ancestors to grow in a fuller knowledge of God and, therefore, to grow in fuller communion with God. While some may raise concerns that salvation can only be offered in this life, Chan contends that both Christian scripture and Christian tradition allow for the opportunity of post-mortem salvation in the intermediate state between death and final judgment.³⁹

Conclusion

This essay has attempted to offer an overview of Christian eschatologies which have been articulated in a number of global contexts. All of these eschatologies can be understood as contextual theologies in their own rights. Intentionally or not, each eschatology addresses the pressing questions of its day. However, the theological responses have had different priorities in terms of how they view temporality: future, present, and past.

Generally speaking, many of those who have been oriented towards the future looked for a hope beyond the concerns of their day. The main challenges tended to be imperialistic in nature – coming from the white European, the Japanese empire, or the Manchurian rulers – which would in turn result in Christian independence movements. Some had a decidedly political and military dimension. In most, the emphasis would be placed on repentance and renewed spiritual and moral purity.

In many of the eschatologies concerned with the present, Christians have contended with the formidable claims of Marxism which critiques views of history that appear to place excessive emphasis on the world to come at the expense of abandoning the concerns of the society today. Perhaps while future-oriented eschatologies are inspired by the reinterpretation of traditional idioms, many of the eschatologies which are focused on the present are inspired by the reinterpretation of modern idioms, especially those raised by Marxism. None of these latter thinkers would reject any future or spiritual dimension to eschatology but, for most, the future should have a lesser role when compared to the ramifications of the kingdom of God for today.

Our third group of eschatological proposals is quite unique from the first two as the emphasis has been on the origins of an individual and the origins of an individual's people. Of the questions many African and Asian Christians ask which find parallels with Greek converts of the ancient Hellenistic world, few are more urgent than the question: What do we do with our ancestors? Both Mbiti and Chan have approached this question with reference to how sacraments bring together people across the generations. The sacraments remind Christians of those who have come before them. But they also look forward. As the Eucharistic words of institution declare: 'For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.' (1 Corinthians 11:23-26, NRSV). Moreover, such timelessness is not limited to the sacraments but also includes credal expressions of Christianity. The Jews were known as followers of the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Christians who recite the Apostle's Creed utter words which soberly reminds all that Jesus shall return to judge 'the quick and the dead'. There is a corporate dimension to rituals, sacramental and credal, which enables a convergence of both time and space.

Despite the differences in each of these approaches, many of the views are interrelated with each other. Often, eschatologies concerned with the present are seen as mutually exclusive from futurist outlooks. But, as we have discussed, both attempt to address the pressing issues of the day in their own unique ways. Indeed, missionaries brought with them their own understandings of time and history which needed to reckon with comparable indigenous understandings. Yet the missionary messages were rarely monolithic and were often weighed

down by theological debates from home. Moreover, many contexts have developed their own theological debates, often reacting to the encroachment of foreign eschatological views. One example is the Anglo-American premillennial discourse on Christian Zionism, first articulated by Lord Shaftesbury in the 1830s,⁴⁰ that would eventually lead to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and the volatile conditions in the decades after. Today, Palestinian Christians continue to consider the question of eschatology, involved in the important task to re-examine previous claims and ‘de-zionise’ the bible and the land.⁴¹

Furthermore, it is important to note that each of these aforementioned eschatologies has a strong corporate dimension. By this I do not mean to highlight the classic distinction made in systematic theology between individual eschatology (concerned with subjects like death, judgment, and heaven and hell) and universal or cosmic eschatology (concerned with topics like the end of the world, the resurrection of the body, and the final consummation of all things). Undoubtedly, Christians are concerned with what happens to themselves, individually, after they die and are interested with what happens to the created order. But even more important is the question: What is the significance for *us*? Each of the Christian eschatologies we have explored has something to say about one’s nation, one’s society, and one’s kin. Eschatology is not only about ‘when’, but also about ‘who’.

This last point raises important considerations to the approach of this essay. The method of systematically analysing eschatologies across three temporal themes is necessarily mechanical and is, therefore, limited. We must not forget that there is an organic nature to Christian thought and practice which tends to be less concerned with neat categorisations. Rarely are any of our subjects focused on only one aspect of time. There is something attractive in Padilla’s approach to the Latin American context which embodies a tension between the present and the future, the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’. In his view, Christians have responsibilities for the societal community today as well as for the eschatological community tomorrow. Such an approach avoids the extremes of both. Yet we must add one more dimension by taking a step backward, if you will – we ought to consider the corporate dimension which remembers those who came before us. This essay has hopefully offered a suggestion of how Christian eschatology has taken, and

fruitfully can take into consideration all three temporal realities of past, present, and future, and the communion of saints who were, who are, and who are to come.

Alexander Chow is a Lecturer in Theology and World Christianity in the School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh. He has written on Christian theology and world Christianity, with a particular focus on East Asia, and is the author of *Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; Chinese edition, Hong Kong: Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, 2015). He may be contacted at Alexander.Chow@ed.ac.uk.

¹ For a few examples, see David Fergusson, 'Introduction' and Christoph Schwöbel, 'Last Things First? The Century of Eschatology in Retrospect', in *The Future as God's Gift: Explorations in Christian Eschatology* eds. David Fergusson and Marcel Sarot (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2000), 1–8, 217–42; Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, 'Preface', in *The Last Things: Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Eschatology* eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), vii–ix; Jerry L. Walls, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* ed. Jerry L. Walls (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9–11.

² The terms 'millennialism' and 'millenarianism' are often used interchangeably. In this essay, I will use the term 'millennialism' to speak about ideas around the millennium arising from Christian views derived primarily from the book of Revelation and the term 'millenarianism' about non-Christian views. See Catherine Wessinger, 'Millennialism in Cross-Cultural Perspective', in *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism* ed. Catherine Wessinger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 22 fn. 2; Kenelm Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969).

Christians throughout history have articulated a variety of views on the millennium which, by the early twentieth century, would be categorised using terms such as premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism would be more commonly used. See Rodney L. Petersen, *Preaching the Last Days: The Theme of 'Two Witnesses' in the 16th & 17th Centuries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 239–47.

³ See David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 313–27.

⁴ Much of this has been traced back to Puritan Christianity in Iain H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope: A Study in Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (London: Banner of Truth, 1971), 129–83.

⁵ The early church tended to hold a premillennial outlook, anxiously expecting Jesus' imminent return before a literal thousand-year reign. However, after Augustine, much of the course of Western Christianity was redirected towards an amillennial orientation, interpreting the millennium of Revelation 20 in figurative terms.

⁶ William A. Dyrness and Oscar García-Johnson, *Theology Without Borders: An Introduction to Global Conversations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 137–55. An earlier attempt was made in the *Global Dictionary of Theology*, but it simply offered a general overview of eschatology before highlighting one African example. See Roland Chia and Emmanuel M. Katongole, 'Eschatology', in *Global Dictionary of Theology* eds. William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 277–85.

⁷ Lamin Sanneh, 'Comparative Millennialism in Africa', in *Imagining the End: Visions of the Apocalypse from the Ancient Middle East to Modern America* eds. Abbas Amanat and Magnus T. Bernhardsson (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 246–7.

⁸ David A. Shank, *Prophet Harris, the 'Black Elijah' of West Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 133–52.

⁹ Donald J. Mackay, 'The Once and Future Kingdom: Kongo Models of Renewal in the Church at Ngombe Lutete and in the Kimbanguist Movement' (PhD thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1985), 296–301.

¹⁰ See Joshua Broggi, *Diversity in the Structure of Christian Reasoning: Interpretation, Disagreement, and World Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 64–5, 78–9.

¹¹ See Paul Richard Bohr, 'The Politics of Eschatology: Hung Hsiu-Ch'uan and the Rise of the Taipings, 1837–1853' (PhD thesis, University of California, Davis, 1978), 189–93.

¹² Carl Kilcourse's recent study of Hong Xiuquan offers a much more positive assessment of Hong's thinking, seeing it as a form of indigenisation of Christianity. Carl S. Kilcourse, *Taiping Theology: The Localization of Christianity in China, 1843-64* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

¹³ Carl S. Kilcourse, 'Son of God, Brother of Jesus: Interpreting the Theological Claims of the Chinese Revolutionary Hong Xiuquan', *Studies in World Christianity* 20, no. 2 (2014): 126–9.

¹⁴ There were only two books that Watchman Nee set out to write: *The Spiritual Man* and *Concerning Our Missions* (later reprinted as *The Normal Christian Church Life*). The other works which bear his name are compilations of articles or notes from his sermons.

¹⁵ Young-hoon Lee, *The Holy Spirit Movement in Korea: Its Historical and Theological Developments* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2009), 38.

¹⁶ See Alexander Chow, *Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment: Heaven and Humanity in Unity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 41–63; David Woodbridge, 'Watchman Nee, Chinese Christianity and the Global Search for the Primitive Church', *Studies in World Christianity* 22, no. 2 (August 2016): 125–47.

¹⁷ Watchman Nee, *The King and the Kingdom of Heaven* (New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, 2014), 271–289, 385.

¹⁸ Chong Bum Kim, 'Preaching the Apocalypse in Colonial Korea: The Protestant Millennialism of Kil Sŏn-ju', in *Christianity in Korea*, eds. Robert E. Buswell, Jr. and Timothy S. Lee (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 154–7.

¹⁹ Martin Spence, *Heaven on Earth: Reimagining Time and Eternity in Nineteenth-Century British Evangelicalism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015).

²⁰ Y. T. Wu, 'How One Christian Looks at the Five Year Movement', *The Chinese Recorder* 61, no. 3 (March 1930): 147.

²¹ Wu Liming, *Jidujiao yu Zhongguo shehui bianqian* [Christianity and Social Change in China], 3rd ed. (Hong Kong: Chinese Christian Literature Council Ltd., 1997), 97–117.

²² K. H. Ting, 'Forerunner Y. T. Wu', in *Love Never Ends* (Nanjing: Yilin Press, [1981] 2000), 77–8.

²³ K. H. Ting, 'Inspirations from Liberation Theology, Process Theology and Teilhard de Chardin', in *Love Never Ends* (1985), 201–10. See Chow, *Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment*, 90–4.

²⁴ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 97.

²⁵ Ibid, 135.

²⁶ Jon Sobrino, 'Jesus and the Kingdom of God: Significance and Ultimate Objectives of His Life and Mission', in *Jesus in Latin America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 96.

²⁷ C. René Padilla, *Mission Between the Times: Essays on the Kingdom*, rev. ed. (Cumbria: Langham Monographs, 2013), 208.

²⁸ Ibid, 209–11. See David C. Kirkpatrick, 'C. René Padilla: Integral Mission and the Reshaping of Global Evangelicalism' (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2015), 108–16, 180–6.

²⁹ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 15–28; John S. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in the African Background: A Study of the Encounter between New Testament Theology and African Traditional Concepts* (London: SPCK, 1971).

³⁰ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 17.

³¹ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

³² See John Parratt, 'Time in Traditional African Thought', *Religion* 7 (Autumn 1977): 117–26; Francis Gillies, 'The Bantu Concept of Time', *Religion* 10 (Spring 1980): 16–30.

³³ Kwame Bediako, 'John Mbiti's Contribution to African Theology', in *Religious Plurality in Africa: Essays in Honour of John S. Mbiti*, eds. Jacob K. Olupona and Sulayman S. Nyang (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1993), 383.

³⁴ Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background*, 51–61.

³⁵ Ibid, 91–181. See John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 98–104.

³⁶ Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 190.

³⁷ Ibid, 149–51, 188–201.

³⁸ Ibid, 195.

³⁹ Ibid, 196–7.

⁴⁰Donald M. Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism: Lord Shaftesbury and Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁴¹Perhaps the most recent work in this has been Munther Isaac, *From Land to Lands, from Eden to the Renewed Earth: A Christ-Centered Biblical Theology of the Promised Land* (Cumbria: Langham Monographs, 2015).